

SOME
SERIOUS REMARKS

O N

A LATE PAMPHLET,

ENTITULED,

The MORALITY of STAGE-PLAYS
Seriously considered.

In a LETTER to a LADY.

By the Rev. Mr. Harper.

Blessed is the Man that walketh not in the Counsel of the Ungodly, nor standeth in the Way of Sinners, nor sitteth in the Seat of the scornful.

PSAL. i. 1.

I have not sat with vain Persons, nor will I go in with Dissemblers.

PSAL. xxvi. 4.

EDINBURGH:

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SOME

SERIOUS REMARKS

ON

ADULT PAMPHLET

INSTITUTION

THE MORALITY OF STAGGERS
Seriously considered.

In a LETTER TO



From the Man that walked not in the Court of the
Gods, nor dwelt in the City of Sodom, nor found in the
Lot of the Kinsfolk.

I have not at all vainly thought, nor will I go to any
length.

EDINBURGH.

Printed in the New-Method.

LETTER, &c.

MADAM,

I Have read the Pamphlet you sent me Yesterday, entituled, *The Morality of Stage Plays seriously considered, &c.* I am sorry to hear, that has been, of late, the Subject of much Controversy, (I ought rather to have said) the Subject of much Contention here, for really Truth and Argument are all on one Side of the Question.

Many Years are past since I had settled my Opinion of that Matter, and was so fully satisfied and determined, that I have not read the Papers which have come abroad on either Side, and perhaps never would, if your Ladyship had not desired I should read this one, and give you my Opinion of it.

I own I have no Talent at compounding Matters between Wisdom and Folly, Virtue and Vice, or Christ and Belial; nor would I attempt it, unless I were first made certain, that Men may get to Heaven upon their own Terms, and that it is not the Privilege of our Creator and Redeemer to prescribe to his own Creatures, or to settle the Conditions upon which their Forgiveness, and his Mercy, are to be obtained.

As I do not know the Author of this Performance, I may treat him with the less Ceremony: Whoever he is, he seems more Master of Language, than of Logick, and to have studied more the Smoothness of his Stile, than the Truth of his Narrative, or the Force of his Arguments.

I have considered his Performance as *seriously*, and perhaps as fully as he has done; and that you may not think I am unjust to him, I will lay before you a few Samples of his Reasoning, and leave you to judge how lucky he has been in his Choice of Topicks, how discreet and fit his Premisses, and how fair and consequential his Inferences are.—Not that I will pretend to equal him in his Flow of Words, or in his Arts of Soothing, and Insinuation: If I could imitate him in this, I would not, for Truth needs no painting to increase its Beauty; it appears best in its native Colours, and plain Dress.

After a long artful Preface, (by which he would perswade the Reader, that he had nothing in his View, but the Peace of Society, and the Good of Mankind) he brings forth his first Argument in favour of the Stage; an Argument which I tremble to repeat, it borders so nigh upon Blasphemy, something like that of the ancient *Pharisees*, who accused our Saviour of casting out Devils by *Belzebub*.

He says, (Page 4th) “ Our Savionr, who
“ appeared at a Time when Plays were in high
“ Repute

* Reputé in different Parts of the *Roman Empire*, says nothing to warn us of their Immorality."——Now, Madam, suppose this were true, it would conclude nothing; it is at best but a negative Argument, of which every one knows the little Force, and that it is against all the Rules of Reasoning, *from Silence to infer Approbation*. I do not remember to have read in the Gospel that our Saviour has said any Thing directly to warn us of the *Immorality of Suicide*, and yet I hope this Author will not hence infer, that Self-murder is lawful.

But I with the Author had seriously considered the Design of our blessed Lord's coming into the World, the Manner of his Appearance in it, with the Aim and Tendency of his Doctrines, his Precepts and Example, to see whether any of these would yield the least Shadow of Authority, or but Apology for the Play-house.——The Design of his Incarnation was to save Sinners.——And for that End, not only to make an Atonement for them by his Blood, but by his Word and Spirit to rectify the Disorders which were got into our Nature, which set and kept us at Distance and Enmity with God, to enable us to restrain and subdue our sinful Lusts and Passions, to make us new Creatures, transformed from earthly, sensual, devilish, into spiritual, holy, and heavenly minded.

The Manner of his Appearance, the Condition of Life he chose, was that of Poverty and Contempt, subject to Hunger, Thirst, Weariness, and the common Feelings of Sympathy

and Compassion.—He went about doing Good, doing the best Things, and suffering the worst: In short, he appeared in the Form of a Servant, which Form he assumed, not of Necessity but Choice, as most conducive to his gracious Design, which was to inculcate those Virtues, which, I hope, even this Gentleman will not say, are taught in the Play-house.—

His divine Doctrines and Precepts all point the same Way with his holy Example.—He enjoins Purity and Peacefulness, Meekness and Mercy, Self-denial, taking up the Cross, and Mortification of our sensual Lusts and Appetites.—Are these Virtues taught and learned in the Play-house?—

We read in the Gospel, that our blessed Saviour was often in the Temple and Synagogues, but not once in the Theatre: That he spent watchful Nights in Devotion, but none in Diversions: That he withdrew from the Crowd for the Purposes of Meditation and Prayer, but not that he resorted to it for Frolick or Amusement.—My Charity obligeth me to think this Author had not seriously considered all this, and that the Character of a Believer or Christian indeed, implies a careful Imitation of Christ's Example, &c. If he had, he could not have had Audacity enough to mention this Argument for the Play, in a Country professing Christianity; at least while the Liberty we boast of, is (I hope) not as yet supposed to imply a Liberty to blaspheme.

When our Lord Jesus Christ enjoined his Followers to “search the Scriptures to find e-

"ternal Life," had he given a Hint in favour of Comedies and Tragedies, and bid them read or hear, and study Plays, as a needful or proper Appendix and Supplement to his holy Word.

When he established his Church upon Earth as a Society, distinct from these of the World, appointing and sending Men chosen by him, on Purpose to instruct and govern that Society, with Commission and Authority, to teach and baptize, that is, to make Disciples, and initiate them into the Belief and Practice of his Religion, and Privileges of his Kingdom, telling them for their Encouragement in that difficult Work, That "to despise, or not to hear them, was" in Effect to despise him.—Had he then put in a *Salvo* in favours of the Writers and Actors of Plays, and sent his Disciples to the Theatre, for supplying the Deficiencies of their authorized, ordinary Guides.

When he wrought miraculous Cures, and bid the Persons recovered "shew themselves to the Priests, and make their Acknowledgments to God by the proper Oblation;" had he told them they might be church'd in the Play-house.

When he warn'd his Disciples, That "the Way to Heaven is strait, and the Gate narrow, and that there are but few who find it." Had he sent them to the Theatre, to learn how to widen the Entrance, or to soften and smoothe the Difficulties occurring in the Passage to it. Had all this been true, this Gentleman might have

have said something to Purpose for the Stage, but the direct contrary appears to be the Case.

I am really concerned and grieved, Madam, to find the Gospel of our Salvation thus burlesqued, and the blessed Author of it thus ridiculed and trifled with. Certainly this hardy Writer must have a poor Opinion of the Understanding and Virtue of his Readers, when by such a Mixture of Profaneness and Audacity, he questions or affronts all their Attainments in Christianity and common Sense.—

I will finish this Article with my earnest Prayers for him, that God would bring him to a better Mind, and not lay this Sin to his Charge.

His next Argument is in the same Page; there he tells us, That “ the Apostle *Paul* in “ writing his Epistle to the *Romans*, among “ various Instructions and Cautions which he “ gives us, is silent on the Subject of Plays, “ which were then in high Repute amongst “ the People he was writing to.”

This Argument is so much of a Piece with the former, that the same Answer will suffice. It is plainly negative, and you have already seen what Weight it can have, and that from simple Silence or Omission, it is not safe to infer Consent or Approbation.

But had this Author seriously considered this excellent Epistle, or but the first and twelfth Chapters of it, 'tis possible he might have made a very different Conclusion.—Towards the End of the first Chapter, the Apostle gives a
most

most dreadful Description of the Religion in Fashion among the Heathen *Romans* at that Time. One can scarce read it without pitying their Ignorance, Stupidity and Debauchery, to which the Theatre had contributed not a little, as will appear by and by, from unexceptionable Evidence fetched out of their own Philosophers and Poets.

He begins the 12th Chapter with exhorting them "to offer themselves to God, a holy, living and acceptable Sacrifice, &c. and that they should *not be conformed to this World*, but be transformed by the renewing of their Mind, that they might prove what is the good and acceptable, and perfect Will of God." And in the rest of that Chapter, he gives many Instructions and Exhortations, not to duelling, fighting, or Suicide; not to cheating or robbing; not to intriguing, procuring, or Amours, (which are often exhibited upon the Stage, and (I am sorry to say it) more frequently and more barefacedly upon the present *British*, than it was of old upon the Pagan *Greek*, and *Roman* Theatres; but to other Duties and Purposes, to Diligence in our Business, Modesty in our Behaviour, Fervour in our Devotions, Charity without Hypocrisy—Almsgiving and Hospitality, and Abhorrence of that which is evil, &c. &c. And which of these last Lessons are often and plainly taught on the Stage, I think I may venture to leave this Author to tell.

He next proceeds to (what he would have pass for positive Proof from Scripture) telling us, that, "In his preaching at *Athens*, the same Apostle (*Paul*) expressly quotes a Sentence from one of the *Greek Poets*, *Acts* xvii. 28. *For in him we live, and move, and have our Being*, as certain of their own Poets have said. This, says he, is a very sublime Expression, and beautifully applied by the Apostle, as will appear on consulting the Context. It shews that he was sensible of the Instructions, and good Impressions we may receive from Poetry, and was directed by that Spirit which had supported him in his Ministry, to apply it so properly to those Purposes. Nor is this the only Proof he has given of good Performances of this Nature. He has in the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, xv. 33. inserted upon the sacred Text, a Line from a *Greek Play*, which now subsists, *Be not deceived, evil Communications corrupt good Manners.*"

The last of these Quotations is from *Menander* a *Greek Poet*, and very properly it is brought on that Occasion. The Apostle had been refuting the *Epicureans*, whose chief Aim was *Pleasure*, or *indulging their Appetites*, as appears from the preceeding Verse, taken likewise from one of them, "Let us eat and drink, for To-morrow we die." In Opposition to this brutal Dogma, he brings forth this Line of *Menander*, "Be not deceived,

&c.

“ &c. And is there any Impropriety in fighting an Adversary with his own Weapons? or can we think the Apostle, by this Citation, meant to enrol the Works of *Menander* into the Canon of Scripture?

The former Quotation, *Acts* xvii. 28. is taken from *Aratus*, one of the *Greek* Poets. Here the Apostle, at *Athens*, was engaged against the Stoicks, who denied that God made the World, but supposed it to have started into Existence, by Chance medley, or a fortuitous Concourse of Atoms. — Against this fanciful unphilosophical Dream, the Apostle brings the Concession of one of their own Poets, “ In him we live and move, and have our Being.” Only what *Aratus* had ascribed to *Jupiter*, the Apostle transfers to the true God, whom (at that Time) the People of *Athens* knew not.

I could have helped our Author to a third Citation from a Heathen Poet, which, for certain Reasons, he did not chuse to mention, and I do not remember to have met with any more in the New Testament; 'tis in *Titus* i. 12. “ The *Cretians* are always Liars; evil Beasts, slow Bellies.” This is taken from *Epimenides*, another *Greek* Poet, and very properly brought furth in an Admonition to *Titus*, who was left in *Crete* to establish a better Religion amongst them. But what avail all these Citations to the Cause, this Gentleman has taken upon him to defend? Of these three Heathen Authors, cited in the New Testament,

stament, two were only Poets, and but the third
 (*Menander*) wrote Comedies, or furnished any
 Entertainment for the Stage. — A Heathen Po-
 et may stumble upon an Expression wise and
 true; an inspired Writer (for a particular Pur-
 pose) cites that wise Saying. What can be in-
 ferred from thence? I hope not that both Au-
 thors are of equal Authority. The Devil spoke
 Truth; when he informed against *Job*. — “ Does
 “ *Job* serve God for nought? — But will any
 Man infer from thence, that we may safely ap-
 ply to the Devil for Information, or Advice?
 — No, Madam, Truth is God's Truth, where-
 ever it is found; like a Mine of Gold, it still
 belongs to the King in whosoever's Ground it
 is discovered. — Enough is said, to shew how
 modest and just that Expression of this Author
 is, Page 6th; where he tells us, “ The Authors
 “ of such Works (*i. e.* Plays) have been e-
 “ steemed worthy of great Praise, and have
 “ been thought to bear a considerable Part in
 “ promoting the Interest of Virtue: We can-
 “ not doubt of this, (says he) when we find
 “ any Degree of Regard paid to them in holy
 “ Writ; and what we have observed to this
 “ Purpose above, is sufficient to connect their
 “ Defence with the Honour of Scripture itself.”
 Madam, The Word of God in holy Scrip-
 ture, is the Privilege, and greatest Blessing in
 the Custody of Christians: We ought often to
 read, hear, and meditate upon it, with Atten-
 tion, Reverence, Humility, and a teachable
 Disposition,

Disposition, free from Prejudice or Prepossession, a Disposition to believe whatever God says, and to obey whatever he commands. — Unhappy and unwise are they, who do not consult and study, and listen to these sacred Oracles, for the Improvement of their Minds, and the Conduct of their Lives. — But I am afraid there are many who read the Holy Scriptures for other Purposes, and with ill Design. — Some read these sacred Books as they do a News Paper or a Romance, only for Curiosity, or for the Sake of History or Amusement: Others read them with Prejudice and Prepossession. — They have got some favourite Opinion into their Heads, and therefore they ransack the Bible, and study those Parts of it which seem to carry some Correspondency to the Opinion they have adopted; these they rack, and screw into a perfect Conformity with their own fond Conceits, and improve every little Probability into a Demonstration. — I wish this Author may not have read in this Way.

There are some, who read the Word of God insidiously, on Purpose to find Matter of Objection and Cavil against it, only that they may get free of its Restraints, and the Yoke it lays upon them: But there are others, who to *Malice* add *Contempt*, who not only stifle and resist its divine Precepts, but also revile and ridicule them, arraign the Wisdom of God, and pronounce his Laws to be weak and impertinent,

ment, lay their Scenes of ridiculous Mirth in the Bible, rally in the sacred Dialect, and play the Buffoons with the most serious Thing in the World.

Whether this Description will take in the *British* Stage, I will leave to others to judge.

Tho' neither my Circumstances nor Inclination lead me to attend the Stage, I am not so unacquainted with what is exhibited (and sometimes applauded) there, but that I fear, the holy Name of God, his Word, his Ordinances, and his Ministers, &c. are often made the Subject of their profane Wit and Drollery: If my Books do not deceive me, I could point to the very Plays and Places where these Things occur.

And if we are come to this impious Licentiousness, I cannot forbear thinking it is one of the Wonders of God's long Suffering, that there are not as many eminent Instances of the Vengeance, as there are of the Guilt.—Certainly this Abuse in Men, who still seem to own the Bible as the Word of God, is more monstrous than in those Deists who deny it: These look upon it as a common Thing, and use it as such; but for those who still confess it sacred, thus to prostitute and profane it, or to encourage them that do so, is a flat Contradiction, as much against the Rules of Decency and Civility, as of Religion.—'Tis to offer the same Abuse to Jesus Christ in his Word, which the rude Soldiers did to his Person, to bow the
Knee

Knee before it, and yet expose it as an Object of Scorn and Laughter.—Men may flatter themselves that these lighter Frolicks will pass for nothing, so long as they do not *seriously* and maliciously oppose God's Word: But tho' they be in Jest, they may find God in earnest; and that he who has *magnified his Word above all Things*, will not brook that we should make it vile and cheap, by playing and dallying with it for our Sport and Pastime; nor will be pleased to have his own Words echoed back to him in profane Drollery.

That this Author I am now *seriously considering*, has read the holy Scriptures with some of the bad Intentions I have mentioned, there is (beside what is already said) a strong Presumption in his 8th to 13th Page; there he brings a profane, saucy, impertinent Parallel between the History of *Joseph* and the late Tragedy of *Douglas*.

I have not seen this late Tragedy, which has made so much Noise, and is like to be hurtful in its Consequences, but have been told (by them I can trust) what the Author's Plan is, and how he has wrought it up. And really, Madam (without insisting upon the great Odds between true and false, History and Fable, or sacred and profane,) I can discover no such Proportion or Resemblance between the two Cases, as can justify a Comparison.

By this Gentleman's own Account of Tragedy (Page 7th and 8th) " it ought to be serious,

“ous, grave and majestic ; to represent the Actions of great Men, and their Conduct chiefly on great and interesting Occasions, &c.”

“We can’t therefore (says he) condemn the Story represented in any Tragedy till we know of what Kind it is, till we know whether it tends to leave good Impressions or bad ones in the Minds of the Hearers.”—

Now let us apply these two Cases to his own Rule. The first shews us a pious, modest, innocent young Man, engaged in a Variety of Trials and Dangers, Snares and Distresses.—He still preserves his Integrity, resists Temptations, and adheres to God and Duty ; and after his Virtue had been sufficiently tried, and held out in the Trial, at last it conquers all Opposition, and is rewarded even in this World.

In the other is represented an unfortunate Lady, struggling against many Counter-blasts of Fortune, and Storms of adverse Fate: For some time she stands the Shock, and has Recourse to Tears and Prayers, and Expostulations with God. But at last her Patience is worn out, she finds no Benefit in drawing nigh to the most High, Why should she wait upon God any longer? so she falls into Despair, runs mad, and kills herself.

The first sets before us a noble Example of Fortitude, Constancy, and Perseverance in Virtue and Holiness, the other exhibits an Instance of Despair and Self-murder. I would ask this Apologist, which of the two is most imitable, and

and leaves the best Impressions on the Minds of the Hearers?

After this Author had insinuated (P. 12th) "That the Christian Church has not invariably discouraged good Plays." He tells us, (Page 13th) "That the Fathers of the Church, whose Authority is probably referred to on this Occasion, *ought surely to have very little Credit with us on their own Account.*" "That a great Part of the Superstition of the Church of Rome is derived from their Inventions, and that we have already totally rejected the Authority of them, and their oral Traditions, when we reformed the Corruption of the Popish Church."

This Gentleman seems to be unacquainted with the Popish Controversy, and the History of the Reformation from the Errors of that Church; had he *seriously considered* these, he would have found, that the Popish Errors were confuted, not by Texts of Scripture only, but by concurring Testimonies from the Fathers of the early Ages, who lived and wrote, and were in high Esteem, long before what we call Popery had prevailed in the World, however little Value he may now set on them.—Had he known this, I hope he would not have made the Church of Rome, so valuable a Present as that of the Fathers; this is really throwing too much Weight into their Side of the Balance. However, as Plays still subsist in Popish Countries, that is one of the Corruptions of the Roman Church,

Church, not yet reformed, which this Author seems very unwilling to part with.

In the same Page he says, “ *Gregory Nanzianzen*, a Father of the Church, and a Person of great Piety, endeavoured to supplant Heathen Plays, by introducing one which he wrote himself, on the most interesting Subject of our Religion.—

I know that *Gregory Nanzianzen* lived in the 4th Century, was a good Scholar, and (what is more) a good Man, that he wrote *Greek* in as great Purity as any one of his Time; insomuch that they substituted his Writings in place of the ancient *Greek* Authors, as the Standard of that Language.—But what then, may not one be a good Scholar without writing Plays?—My Books tell me that he wrote 55 Discourses or Sermons, and yet a greater Number of divine Poems: But must every Poet be a Comedian?

I know too that there was a spurious Piece, a Tragedy, entituled, *The Sufferings of Christ*, once ascribed to him; but I hope this Author does not mean to palm that upon us at this Time of Day, as the Work of *Nanzianzen*, after the best Judges, and most learned Critics (such as Doctor *Cave* and *Dupin*) have declared it unworthy of him, and delivered his Character from that Imputation.

But what if, to oblige our Author, I should give up *Gregory Nanzianzen* as a Friend to the Stage, it would profit him very little, when all
his

his Contemporaries, and the Fathers both before and after him, (whether single or united in Councils) have bore Testimony on the other Side.

It would not be difficult for me to lay before your Ladyship the Sentiments of the early Fathers on this Subject.— Of *Theophilus* of *Antioch*, and *Tertullian* in the 2d Century, (this last is decisive, and has exhausted the Argument;) of *Clemens* of *Alexandria*, *Minutius Felix* and *Cyprian* in the third; and after them of *Iactantius*, *Chrysostom*, *Hierom*, and *Augustine*.—I might also set before you the Decrees or Canons of Councils, both in *Europe* and *Africa*, against the Stage, down to the 5th Century, and I would come no lower than to those good Times of Truth, Piety and Purity, before Popery (properly so called) had got Footing in the World.

But I foresee this would be tedious, and swell this Letter beyond the Bulk I intended; besides, I am afraid our Author would have no Regard for the Sentiments of those old holy Men, (some of them Martyrs too;) tho', if the Grace of God should touch his Heart so far, as *seriously* to consider their Reasonings on this Subject, I dare say he would alter his Opinion of the modern as well as the ancient Stage, and not think so contemptibly of them that oppose it, as at present he seems to do.

There is one Thing I would beg Leave to insert here, though it is out of its proper Place.

C

Upon

Upon a Review of *Tertullian*, I find a Passage which I ought to have remembered, when I was animadverting upon the Author's first Class of Arguments for the Stage, *i. e.* those from Scripture. As it escaped me there, I will give it Room here, though it might have done better in another Place.—It seems the Sentiments and Fashions of some, have been the same in all Ages.—*Tertullian* says, That in his Time, “ some People's Faith was either too full of
 “ Scruples, or too barren of Sense, and that
 “ nothing would serve to settle them but a Text
 “ of Scripture: That they hovered in Uncer-
 “ tainty, because it is not as expressly said, Thou
 “ shalt not go to the Play-house, as it is, Thou
 “ shalt not kill.—But this looks more like
 “ Fencing than Argument: For we have the
 “ Meaning of the Prohibition, though not the
 “ Sound, in the first Psalm, *Blessed is the*
 “ *Man that walks not in the Counsel of the*
 “ *Ungodly, nor stands in the Way of Sinners,*
 “ *nor sits in the Seat of the Scornful.*

But it is possible, and not very unlikely, that this sly Author is one of those fine Gentlemen, (distinguished by the good Name of Free-thinkers,) who strut and vapour upon the Privileges and Extent of their Reason and natural Powers.—And if he is, I would refer him to other Authorities against the Stage, to which he will probably pay more Respect; I mean those of the ancient Heathen Sages, both *Greek* and *Roman* Philosophers, Orators and Historians.

I am

I am convinced, that Nature was the same, in the Days of *Socrates*, *Pythagoras*, *Plato* and *Aristotle*, that it is now, (except that it is dignified by Jesus Christ's assuming it) and that they enjoyed no less Clearness and Strength of natural Reason, than a *Shaftsbury*, *Tindal*, *Toland*, *Collins*, *Woolston*, *Bolingbroke*, or any other of the later Deists do; notwithstanding all the Helps they have derived from Holy Scripture, for which they are very unthankful, and of which they have made a very bad Use.

Now, Madam, If it should appear that the best and wisest, and most esteemed of the Heathen Fathers, did (for human and political Reasons) disapprove of the Stage, and that even in that Time of Darkeness and Infidelity, few or none did contend for, or furnish Entertainment for the Stage, but poor, half-bred Scholars, whose Wit was predominant for their Judgment, or who wrote either for Vanity, or Necessity for Subsistence, or an Affectation of Singularity. This might be worthy of our Author's *serious* Consideration.

Plato banisheth Plays from his Commonwealth, because (says he,) they raise the Passions, and pervert the Use of them, and therefore are dangerous to Morality. — *Aristotle* lays it down for a Rule, that the Law ought to forbid young People the seeing of Comedies, for very good Reasons which he there assigns. — And *Xenophon* commends the *Persians*, that they would not suffer their Youth to see any Thing amorous, because it was dangerous to add Weight to the Bias of Nature.

Such were the Sentiments of the wiser *Greeks*: And accordingly *Plutarch* tells, that the *Lacedemonians*, (who were remarkable for the Wisdom of their Laws, the Sobriety of their Manners, and their breeding of brave Men,) would not in their Government endure the Stage in any Form, nor under any Regulation.—And even the *Athenians*, who admitted the Play-house in their State, yet thought *Comedy* so unrespectable a Performance, that they made a Law, ‘ That no Judge of the *Areopagus* should make one.’

If we come down to the *Romans*, we shall find the same Impressions in the wisest and best: *Cicero* cries out upon “ licentious Plays and “ Poems, as the Bane of Sobriety and an Hindrance to wise Thinking.”—He says expressly, “ That *Comedy* subsists in Lewdness, “ and that Pleasure is the Root of all Evil.” *Titus Livius* tells us the Origin of Plays among the *Romans*, That they were brought in upon the Score of Religion, to pacify the Gods, and remove a Mortality: But then he adds, That the Motives are sometimes good, when the Means are bad; that the Remedy in this Case was worse than the Disease, and the Atonement more infectious than the Plague.

His Contemporary *Valerius Maximus* gives much the same Account of the Rise of Theatres at *Rome*: But then he says, they occasioned civil Distractions; that the State first blushed, and then bled for the Entertainment: And so

so he concludes the Consequences of Plays intolerable.

Seneca complains of the Extravagance and Debauchery of the Age, and how forward People were to improve in that which was nought; that scarce any Body would apply themselves to the Study of Nature and Morality, unless when *the Play-house was shut*, or the Weather foul. — That there is nothing more destructive to good Manners than to run idling to see *Sights*; for *there Vice makes an insensible Approach, and steals in upon us* in the Disguise of Pleasure.

Tacitus complains of *Nero*, that he hired decayed Gentlemen for the Stage: He says, it was the Part of a Prince to relieve their Necessity, but not to tempt it, and that his Bounty should rather have set them above an ill Practice, than driven them upon it. — And in another Place, he tells us, the *German Women* were guarded against Danger, and kept their Honour out of Harm's Way, by having no *Play-houses* amongst them.

Nay, even *Ovid* himself, whose Poems, (some of them,) had contributed not a little Assistance to Amours and Immorality, yet when he came to himself, he endeavours to make some Amends for his Faults, and gives *Augustus* a sort of Plan for a publick Reformation; and among other Things he advises “the suppressing of Plays by his Authority, be-
“ cause

“ cause they were the Promoters of Lewdness,
 “ and Dissolution of Manners.”

In the *Theodosian Code*, *Players* are called by a Name, which according to the softest Translation can mean no less than Persons of *bad Character*.—And upon this Text *Gothofred* says, “ The Function of *Players* was (by
 “ the civil Law) counted *scandalous*; and that
 “ they who came upon the Stage to divert
 “ the People, had a Mark of Infamy set upon
 “ them.”

But as *Theodosius* was a Christian, I ought not to have mentioned him in this Place, tho’ he lived in the fourth Century, and long before the Rise of Popery.—Nor was it necessary, as we may go back to the Times of Heathen *Rome* to find the Government observing and curbing the Stage. The *Roman Censors*, whose Business it was to take Care of Regularity and Manners, looked on these *Play-houses* as no other than Batteries raised against Virtue and Sobriety, and for this Reason often pulled them down before they were well built. — So that here we can argue upon the Precedents of Nature, and plead the wiser Heathens against the foolish. — If Magistrates now shewed the same Zeal, they could not escape our Author’s very severe Censure.—Upon this View *Pompey the Great*, when he built his dramattick Bawdy-house, put a Chapel on the Top of it: He would not let it go under the Name of a Play-house, but convened the People to a solemn

solemn Dedication, and called it the Temple of *Venus*; giving them to understand, that there were Benches under it for Diversion.—For he was afraid, if he had not gone this cunning Way to Work, the *Censors* might afterwards have razed the Monument, and branded his Memory.—Thus a scandalous Pile of Building was protected, the Temple covered the Play-house, and the Care and Discipline of the Magistrate were baffled by a Pretence of Religion.

This, Madam, was the Opinion of these celebrated Authors with respect to *Theatres*; they charge them with the Corruption of Principles and Manners, and lay in Cautions and Caveats (very wise and judicious) against them; and yet these Men had seldom any Thing but this World in their Scheme, and formed their Judgments only upon natural Light, and common Experience: All they aimed at was the Preservation of Virtue, Decency and good Order, with the Peace and Safety of the States and Countries they lived in: For they had little or no Notion of a future Life, and were very uncertain about what should become of them when they died.

Now, one would think, that the Argument should rise in its Force, and conclude much stronger with us, who have Life and Immortality brought to Light by the Gospel, are sure that there is a future Reckoning, where we must account for the Manner in which we have spent our Time here, and be finally doomed to everlasting

everlasting Misery or Happiness, according to our Behaviour.

It could never be the Design of God's Providence (wise and good) to send us into this World merely to frisk and sport, and play ourselves a while, (like young Beasts in a fine fruitful Meadow) and then tumble out of it with as little Care, or Thought (as they have) of what is to become of us hereafter.

It is a common Complaint, That Life is short, and the Term of it uncertain. Is it not then very surprising, that they who make this Complaint, spend so great a Part of this short Time, either to no Purpose, or to that which is worse than none, by running about from one idle Amusement to another, all of them unprofitable, and some of them dangerous?

Not that I intend by this to recommend Dulness and Solitude, and a total Abstraction from Company and the World, while we live in it, but only in so far as we have renounced it in our Baptism. — It is none of my Meaning to make People Monks or Hermits, nor to forbid proper Diversions and Recreations; only I would have them well timed, well chosen, such as may conduce to Health, Vigour, Activity, and the Improvement of our Minds and Manners; and I'm afraid the Entertainments of the Play-house conduce to neither.

I do not say the Action, or Oratory in the Pulpit, is equal to these on the Stage; but I think I may venture to affirm, there is more of
Truth,

Truth, Morality and good Sense, in one well composed Discourse, than has appeared in all the Plays exhibited on the *British* Theatre ever since we had one, *Cato* itself not excepted.

This brings to my Remembrance some delicate Strokes of our Author, which I had almost forgot to take Notice of. — He tells (Page 2d and 3d) “ That the Stage has subsisted in *Britain* about Two hundred Years. — That “ if Plays are a Poison, it is, at least, but slow “ in its Operations. — And that however the “ Stage may have corrupted our People, the “ Manners of the People have so far prevailed, “ as in some Respects to have reformed the “ Stage. That on this Head we may come to “ a sure Conclusion, because we may compare “ Plays that were admitted during some Part “ of this Period, with those which are now “ chiefly in repute. In making this Compari- “ son, it will appear, that a certain Degree of “ Indecency and Licentiousness once permitted, “ is now rejected, and that Plays more pure “ and of a better moral Tendency, are either “ chosen from our ancient Stock, or that these “ Qualities at least are expected from every “ Writer of the present Age.” — I remember to have read many Years ago a Book on that Subject, (written by a masterly Hand) wherein a Parallel is carried on between the *British* and the ancient Heathen (*Greek and Roman*) Stage. — He brings the Plays of *Æschylus* and *Sophocles*, of *Plautus* and *Terence*, &c. or Pas-

pages from them, and collates with them the Compositions exhibited on the *British Theatre*, (such as the *Mock Astrologer*, the *Orphan*, the *Old Batchelor*, and *Double Dealer*; *Love Triumphant*, *Love for Love*, the *Provok'd Wife*, the *Relapse*, &c.) and shews evidently that, in Point of Immodesty and Profaneness, of Cursing and Swearing, of the Abuse of Religion and the Holy Scriptures, and the Abuse of the Clergy — the Christian Stage (if it is not a Blunder, an Absurdity to call it so) is much less pure, and more faulty than the Heathen was. As I am afraid that excellent Book is now almost out of Print, if I was equal to the Charge, I would give it a new Impression; (it is but about 400 Pages in 8vo.) I would indeed forbear to mention the Author's Name, for Fear of lessening his Influence, at least with the Gentleman I now deal with, who seems to have a very poor Opinion of Men of that Complexion and Character. . But there is no such Danger in telling your Ladyship, that he was a Clergyman of the Church of *England*, and one of great Learning and Piety, who preferred Poverty, and the Peace of his Mind, to a good Benefice, and the Countenance of Men in Power.

'Tis true, this Apologist for the Stage has told us, that the Plays of our ancient Stock, *i. e.* those in Use long ago, are now reformed, and purged of every Thing offensive.—It may be so; but I have been told, that a Comedy
lately

lately exhibited, (after all its Mutilations and Refinements) gave the Ladies some Use for their Fans, to cool and cover their Faces.— I dare say many, (and I hope all of them) would have taken it much amiss, to be addressed in the same Manner and Language at home, they were on the Theatre ; and I cannot think, Indecency and Smutt are the less guilty, or ought to be the less offensive for being publick.

From the 16th Page and forward, this Author brings a Number of foreign Auxiliaries to support his Possession of the Play-house.— He asks, Page 27th, “ Whether Knowledge, Industry and Commerce are declined in this City, since the Play-house was opened here. “ That the Manager must suit his Entertainments to the Company; and if he is not “ supported by the Grave and the Sober, he “ must suit himself to the Licentious and Profane. Page 21. That if we could abolish “ the Stage, we should only make Room for “ the Return of Drunkenness, Gaming, and “ rude Cabals ; and that the State of the Poor, “ (whether indigent and reduced, or of the industrious and laborious) is much mended by “ the Play-house.— That the first Class is relieved by Poor-houses erected of late, and “ that the other is employed, and thereby maintained, by furnishing the Tables, Cloathing “ and Equipage of the Rich, &c. Page 23. &c.

Madam, It is none of my Business to follow him through all this wild Goose-chace he has devised

devised for himself. Had he thought his first Principle (the *Morality* of the *Stage*) on which he set out, fully established on Scripture and Reason, he had no Occasion for these mercenary Troops to maintain his Cause. I am persuaded, that an invariable Regard to Truth and Honesty, is the best Policy, and the best Logick too. But though my Intention carried me no further, than to wipe off the vile Aspersions he has thrown upon holy Scriptures, and the best Authorities, I think it might not be from the Purpose to ask him the following Questions, naturally arising from the Principles and Facts he has advanced in the Pages above referred to.

Whether substantial, useful Knowledge and Literature, are in a more flourishing Condition now, than they were many Years ago? — Whether the greatest Men now, in the Professions of Law, Physick or Theology, think themselves, far superior in their several Professions, to a *Craig* of *Rickarton*, a *Forbes* of *Corse*, a *Pitcairn*? and whether these great Men derived their most extensive Erudition from the Play-house? — Whether, if the Stage conduceth so much to the Increase of Literature, it was not a Blunder to forbid it in the Vicinity of the great Seminaries of Learning, *Oxford*, *Cambridge*, &c.? — Whether, if Industry and Commerce have not declined in this City, since the Play-house was opened here, being a Question of Facts, it may not be fit to ask it of the Merchants and Artificers? and if they say these
are

are rather increased, it may not be fit to ask, whether that Increase is more owing to the Play-house, than to other Incidents?

“ Whether, if the Manager of a Stage must
 “ suit his *Entertainments to the Company*, and
 “ if he be not supported by the *Grave* and
 “ the *Sober*, he must suit himself to the *Licen-*
 “ *tious* and *Profane*, ” be not to affirm, (in
 other Words) That if a Man cannot support
 his Luxury by lawful Means, and honest La-
 bour, he may have Recourse to the High-way,
 not to beg, but to rob and murder?—Whe-
 ther, if Clubs and Gossipings concerted in the
 Play-house, have (after the Farce was over)
 been kept in the Tavern, where they have sup-
 ped, drank, gamed, &c. to very late, or ra-
 ther early Hours? And if this is true, whether
 there was Truth or Propriety in that Witticism
 of our Author, That if we could abolish the
 Play-house, we should only make Room for
 the Return of Drunkenness, Gaming and rude
 Cabals? Whether, “ If they who were the
 “ readiest to shed Tears, for the Distresses re-
 “ presented in the Tragedy of *Douglas*, ” were
 the most numerous, or most forward for erect-
 ing of poor Houses? and if they were, whether
 they got their Impressions of Humanity and
 Pity from the Stage, where other Lessons (those
 of Gallantry and Revenge) are more frequently
 taught?

Whether the Rich and Great might not live
 according to that Rank in which Providence
 has placed them, and have *Gloaths*, *Table* and
Equipage

Equipage suited to their Station, tho' there were no Play-house to go to?—And if they may, Whether the *Spinster*, the *Weaver*, the *Clothier*, and other *Tradesmen*, might not be as much employed, and as punctually paid for their Labour, if so much Money was not squandered for the Play-house?—Whether there is not as much Virtue in Charity, and as great Reward annexed to it, when Men give it only for the Love of God, and Obedience to his Law, as when (to the true and proper Motive) they add the Expectation of diverting themselves? And whether it was not paying but a coarse Compliment to *People of Figure and Fortune*, to insinuate, that if they had not the Play-house here, they would no longer live in *Edinburgh*, but must go where they could find it?—Upon the whole, Whether this Author is true and just in his Pleading for the Stage, or only specious and misleading?

This Gentleman (Page 26, &c.) concludes his good Work, by insinuating his great Regard and Concern for a very *respectable* Body, a Judicature in this City; tho' all the Compliment he pays to their Learning is taken away by a fly Imputation of Rashness and Tyranny in their Proceedings. If he means the Presbytery of *Edinburgh*, (as indeed he seems to do,) they are able enough to answer for themselves, and vindicate the Conduct complained of.—Tho' I am no Member of that Society, I have had the Pleasure of being acquainted with severals of them, whom I thought

Men

Men of Learning and Character. — I have read their Admonition in last *January*, and in my poor Opinion, it is a wise, well expressed, and very seasonable Warning to their Hearers, who certainly owe them Thanks for it.

'Tis true, they have not entered deep into the Merits of the Cause, nor indeed could they, in so short a Paper; but they have very judiciously mentioned the Impropriety of running after these idle, expensive Entertainments in this Time of Dearth and Distress.

The present is a Time of Danger, or actual Calamity in most Parts of the known World. — War rages on the Continent of *Europe*, in *Asia* and *America*, and did but very lately in *Africa*. — There is in many Places, Famine, in some, Pestilence, in others, Earthquakes, Inundations, Hurricanes, and Devastations by Fire. — God has not left himself without Witness, nor us without Remedy; he has not been wanting in the Means of our Amendment, but we have been wanting in the Use and Application. — He has sent abroad his Judgments to alarm our Fears, and awaken the World to Thought and Seriousness; but if Men will not listen to his Calls, he has provided no Cure for Obstinacy. He made us free Agents, and will not alter his Scheme, by forcing us to be wise, and good, and happy, whether we will or not.

After so many Differences in Opinion with our Author, there is one Thing wherein I must agree with him: He says (Page 1st) that “Disputes arising among the Professors of true Religion

“ Religion, may end in *Divisions* and *Animo-*
 “ *sities*, hurtful to the Spirit of Religion it-
 “ self.—And that People who begin such Dif-
 “ putes, have much to answer for, unless they
 “ have sufficient Reason for what they do.”—

I am of the same Sentiments, and believe, that as Offences must come, there is a Wo denounced against them by whom they come.—But whether this Offence, and these Disputes, came by the Play-house or the Presbytery, I will leave the intelligent Reader to judge.

I love Peace, and do most sincerely wish it prevailed in all the World.—At the same time it might be too dearly paid for, if it is at the Expence of Truth. If we cannot be in Friendship with Thieves and Robbers, but by abrogating the Laws, and overturning the Government which restrains them, and preserves Property. If we cannot be in Peace with the Devil, and his Agents, without renouncing our Creed, abjuring our Baptism, and giving up our Bible; I think that Peace is purchased at too high a Price, after all that this Gentleman has said to bring us to a Meeting, and soften the Terms of Accommodation.

My present Distress hinders me to write your Ladyship with my own Hand: I am forced to employ that of a Friend, who knows not to whom I write. You will (I hope) not only pardon this Freedom, but consider it as a Testimony of my Readiness to obey your Commands, and Zeal to approve myself in the best Manner I can.

Your Ladyship's faithful Servant.

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